

STREET\$1SHEET

PUBLISHED BY THE COALITION ON HOMELESSNESS SINCE 1989

SUGGESTED MINIMUM DONATION: ONE DOLLAR

Volume 24, No. 22

NOVEMBER 15-30, 2012

<http://streetsheetsf.wordpress.com>

BERKELEY REJECTS SITTING PROHIBITION AND THE SAN FRANCISCO MODEL



By Bob Offer-Westort

While the last vote has not yet been counted, at this point it seems certain that Berkeley's Measure S—a proposed law that would have made it a crime to sit on the sidewalk—has failed. The sitting prohibition is trailing in the polls by 4%, with few (likely progressive) votes left to count.

The No on S victory is a notable upset both for the national trend of homeless criminalization laws and for development and commercial real estate interests in Berkeley. Since 1993, "sit/lie" laws—laws that make it a crime for people to sit or

lie down on public sidewalks—have been spreading around the country, particularly intensely on the West Coast and in Florida. While the laws nominally apply universally, universal enforcement is never the actual intention: Sit/lie laws are a law plus a wink and a nudge. Everyone knows that the intent is that they be enforced exclusively to "shoo homeless people" out of public places, as the Downtown Berkeley Association's John Caner put it.

San Francisco passed such a law in 2010 through Proposition L. Aside from two such laws passed in 1968 in San Francisco and Los Angeles (the former of which was repealed after several successful constitutional challenges, the latter of which remains on the books but which has had enforcement curtailed as a result of the settlement of a constitutional challenge), the Patient X for these laws is Seattle, which passed the first

of the current batch of sit/lie laws in 1993. Since then, nearly three dozen cities have passed such laws. What makes Berkeley different?

The lazy answer—and Bay Area print journalism has already shown characteristic interest in the lazy answer—is that Berkeley is simply perversely weird. But that explanation doesn't cut the mustard: Berkeley and San Francisco are unique in the two-decade history of these laws in that they are the only two cities to have considered sit/lie laws at the ballot, and that both have done so twice. Berkeley, in fact, passed a sit/lie law in 1994, only to have it repealed through a constitutional challenge. San Francisco rejected a nearly identical law the same year. One would be hard-pressed to argue that Berkeley has become less conservative than it was in 1994, or that San Francisco has become more conservative in the past two decades than Berkeley has.

The victory is even more surprising given the shape of the campaign to pass Measure S: Proponents spent roughly \$120,000 on the campaign—more than was spent on any other

campaign this year (including that for mayor), and likely more than has ever been spent on any other campaign in Berkeley history. (We have not checked all campaign records since Berkeley's 1878 founding, but have found very few campaigns that approach even half as much money in the past decade.) 86% of this money came from corporations or limited liability companies.

For understanding why corporations would spend so much money on a law like this, San Francisco provides an instructive example. Perhaps the only instructive example. In 2010, real estate and finance corporations provided roughly \$412,000 in funding to pass this city's Proposition L. The largest backer, Ron Conway, told business leaders that this was part of an effort to "take San Francisco back" from progressives. In conservative states, undocumented migrant workers and queer people are a convenient scapegoat for economic or social ills, and conservatives very effectively use popular prejudices against these people as a wedge issue to elect candidates whose val-

CONTINUED PN PAGE 5

A SIMPLE SOLUTION TO HOMELESSNESS AND IT'S BEEN RIGHT IN FRONT OF OUR FACES ALL ALONG

In cities across the United States, there exists a peculiar situation: the number of vacant housing units greatly exceeds the number of homeless people. Earlier this fall, the San Francisco Chronicle, using U.S. Census Bureau data, released an article listing America's most vacant cities. The article presents prime examples of this country's particular, illogical situation where rental units and homes lie abandoned, unused, and deteriorating while homeless and low-income people sleep in shelters, cars,

doubled-up with others, or on the streets.

Homelessness can be solved today. There are nearly 13 million vacant housing units throughout our cities and rural areas; a supply of available housing far exceeding the estimated 3 million people who will experience homelessness in the country. From city to city, using only existing infrastructure, we have the means necessary to give everyone a home.

Orlando
12-month averages
Rental vacancy: 18.8%
Homeowner vacancy rate: 2.2%

Home to Disneyworld and nicknamed "The City Beautiful", Orlando has become one of America's most popular cities. In 2009, according to Forbes, this Sun Belt city became the most visited tourist spot US. Beneath the sun-bleached roofs and beyond the palm-tree-lined streets and tranquil lakes, however, Orlando has the highest numbers of vacant houses and apartments.

The Displaced, an educational campaign designed to "raise awareness about Central Florida's displaced community," states that

the "average number of displaced people on any given night in Central Florida is 3,970." In 2010, they estimated that more than 9,887 people experienced homelessness; an increase of about 17% from 2008, when the recession began. More than 10,000 school-age children in Orlando and the surrounding counties will be homeless at some point during the year, according to the Orlando Sentinel. This represents an increase of 79% since 2009. These children comprise over 20% of Florida's 49,885 homeless school-aged children.

The city of Orlando alone is estimated by The Business Journals to have 194,819 vacant housing units—nearly ten times the number of people who will go homeless in Central Florida.

Dayton Ohio
Rental vacancy: 11.3%
Homeowner vacancy: 5.4%

Dayton, known for its aviation history and more recently for its economic development, is the sixth largest city in the state of Ohio and suffers from the highest average homeowner vacancy rate in the U.S. In 2010, when the Census

was taken, Dayton had more than 20% of its housing units vacant. A total of 15,661 houses, condo, and apartments were abandoned and unused, according to the Dayton Daily News.

In Montgomery County, where Dayton is located, the Homeless Management Information System recorded 857 homeless individuals—a tiny percentage of the open, vacant housing units.

Detroit
Rental vacancy: 16.9%
Homeowner vacancy: 1.7%

In 2008, according to the Institute for Children, Poverty, and Homelessness, Detroit had the highest number of homeless people and persons in families, 11,913 and 6,149 respectively. The situation for low-income families in Detroit is especially daunting, with families comprising 36.4% of the homeless population. In fact, over one-third of the city's residents currently live below the poverty level and have an unemployment rate of 12.6%.

From 2005 to 2010, Detroit has struggled through at least 55,000 foreclosures, and the New York

CONTINUED PN PAGE 5

When you purchase the STREET SHEET, 100% of your donation goes directly to the STREET SHEET vendor. Donations made to STREET SHEET vendors do not go to the STREET SHEET or to the Coalition on Homelessness.
To help keep this paper in print, please consider making a one-time donation or becoming a STREET SHEET underwriter (page 8).
We greatly appreciate the support of all of our donors and underwriters—both to our vendors and to the paper itself.

MANY PEOPLE SEE HOMELESSNESS AS A SMALL PROBLEM

By Lina Rosengren

Having a home is especially important for children. A good home is a place where the family gathers and where a child gets the love, security, comfort and peace needed to shape an identity and build self-esteem in order to face the world and develop as a human being.

But what happens to children and adolescents who, for different reasons can't stay with their families, or who grow up in families that have been evicted and have no place to go?

There are no exact figures on the number of homeless children in San Francisco but most organizations estimate that there are over 2,000 families living in temporary shelters, cars and cheap hotels.

Most homeless children feel ashamed about not having a place to live, and they're often good at concealing their problems. Their ability to hide the fact that they're homeless is the reason that they're often invisible in the stats. None the less, they are there for the ones who are willing to see them. They take round-about ways from school so that their friends won't know that their family stays in a hotel. The ones who ran away from home stay with friends for a while, and when that doesn't work out they turn to older acquaintances that let them sleep over, often in exchange for sex or other "favors."

No one wishes to be a bad parent, but parenthood is sometimes tough. Parents who face exclusion, unemployment, a bad economy and an insecure housing situation often experience great stress, and this affects children negatively. It is a fact that child abuse and domestic violence tend to increase in families that live under great economic pressure. Children can sense when their parents are anxious, and tend to worry as much as the grown ups. According to Compass family services, 50 percent of homeless children suffer from emotional problems such as anxiety and depression; 70 percent suffer from chronic illness.¹

"The worst thing about this situation is that I feel so bad for my son", says a single mother who stays in a tiny hotel room (130 sq. ft.) with her one-year-old daughter and her five-year-old son.

"Before he started school I could see that he suffered from being in the small room many hours every day, but as a single mother with a new-born it was difficult for me to get down to the park, and I was very worried that my son would get depressed and wouldn't develop in a normal way."

Homeless children come from different backgrounds but they have one thing in common: they feel a strong distrust of the representatives of society. Many have been in contact with authorities and they feel frustrated and betrayed by police, social workers and others who have promised to help them and their family, but who have not, in their eyes, fulfilled the promise.

It is difficult for homeless people in general to get the help they're entitled to. But this is especially true for families with lower levels of education. Children and adolescents lack the necessary tools to navigate the system. They don't know their rights, or where to go for help.

Many children and young people who end

up living alone on the street come from families that are facing great difficulties. These children might have been subjected to physical and/or emotional abuse for several years, but usually it is when the child becomes a teenager that he or she decides to run away from home, or gets thrown out by the parents.

In a legal sense a person is considered a child until he or she turns 18, which means that young people have limited ability to influence their situation; at the same time, society places high demands on young people. They are supposed to behave maturely and responsibly, to turn to the right authorities during office hours, and to explain their problems in a correct and clear manner. However, most kids are not mature and verbal. And it might be too much to ask a teenager, whose experiences are both painful and shameful, to open up and give a detailed account of their situation during a first brief meeting with authorities. Yet this is what they are asked to do in order to receive the help they're entitled to.

In some cases it might be necessary to separate children from abusive parents, but to place kids in foster families is not always the best solution. Supporting the family is usually the best way also to support the child.

A lot of the help available to children expires when they turn 18. However, as most parents know, being an adult on paper does not imply actual independence. Few 18-year-olds have a steady job or a place to live, and for the ones who lack economic and emotional support from a loving family, the pressure sometimes gets too much to handle.

Research shows that most children growing up in foster families lose at least one of their biological parents within five years. If the foster family understand that their mission is completed when the foster child turns 18, then these young adults are at high risk for ending up on the street. It is hardly surprising that depression and suicidal thoughts are more common than average within this group.

It is understandable that many children and young people who are homeless are pessimistic about their future. But their negative self-image must never be confirmed by society. Although authorities cannot offer the unconditional love that a home ought to provide, society can choose to stand by these children and see them for what they are: young individuals who, literally, have their whole lives ahead of them.

It is worth investing resources in these young people, the children and their families, because: although its true that many of those who have a rough childhood can still live a good life, it's also true that many of the homeless people you see in the streets of San Francisco had a really bad childhoods, and maybe things would have worked out differently for them if they had received the right help in time.

Lina Rosengren is a freelance journalist from Sweden. She worked with Street Sheet for two weeks in October as a volunteer writer. Her published work includes regular submissions to the street paper, *Situation Stokholm*.

STREET SHEET EDITORIAL POLICY

The Coalition on Homelessness, San Francisco, is made up of homeless and formerly homeless people, representatives of over fifty service, shelter, and housing providers, advocacy groups, and neighborhood and religious organizations. The Coalition's volunteers and staff, many of whom have been homeless, write most of the articles in the **STREET SHEET**. These appear without a byline. Articles by people who are not COH staff members, or extremely personal articles, usually receive a byline. These articles do not necessarily represent the views of the COH: The **STREET SHEET** aims to provide a forum for voices which are not commonly heard in mainstream media.

Content may not be reproduced without permission. Contact Coordinating Editor Kenneth Dotson at 415.346.3740.

CONTRIBUTORS AND STAFF

Miguel Carrera, Wanika Stephens, Jennifer Friedenbach, Jesus Perez, Jenice Standfield, Ivette Zuniga, Ron Merritt, Elisa Gasca, Will Daley, Nick Kimura, Julia D'Antonio, Irma Nunez, William Morder, Andrew Mendes Jason Rivers, Gail Seagraves

Coordinating Editor: Kenneth Dotson

Printed by Marin Sun on Recycled Paper

STREET SHEET VENDING PROJECT

STREET SHEET circulation is 32,000 copies monthly; 1,200 are mailed out, 1,000 distributed to shelters, and 29,800 are sold by homeless and poor people on the streets as an alternative to panhandling.

STREET SHEET project volunteers work out of the Coalition on Homelessness' office. Homeless and low-income vendors receive up to 75 papers per day, selling them for one dollar per copy, and keeping 100% of the proceeds.

STREET SHEET vendors ARE NOT authorized to collect funds for the Coalition on Homelessness through door-to-door solicitation or any other method.

To support the Coalition on Homelessness financially, or to purchase a subscription, contact the Coalition directly:

Mail: 468 Turk Street San Francisco, CA 94102

Phone: 415.346.3740

Fax: 415.775.5639

E-Mail: kdotson@streetsheet.org

Websites:
<http://streetsheetsf.wordpress.com>
www.cohsf.org

Thank you.

COALITION ON HOMELESSNESS MEETINGS

Our organizing is based on extensive peer outreach. The information gathered directly drives the Coalition's work: We do not bring our agenda to poor and homeless people—they bring their agenda to us. Our advocacy agenda is primarily designed by the Coalition workgroups, which involve and strengthen collaboration between homeless people, concerned community members, and providers of social, health care, housing, employment, and legal services, to systematically address needs identified in outreach.

To learn more about COH workgroup meetings, please contact us at 415.346.3740.

MEETINGS

Housing Justice Workgroup

Every Tuesday at 12 noon

Human Rights Workgroup

Every Wednesday at 12:30 p.m.

STREET SHEET

New Vendor Orientation

Every Friday at 10:00 a.m..

*All meetings are at 468 Turk Street
Between Larkin and Hyde*

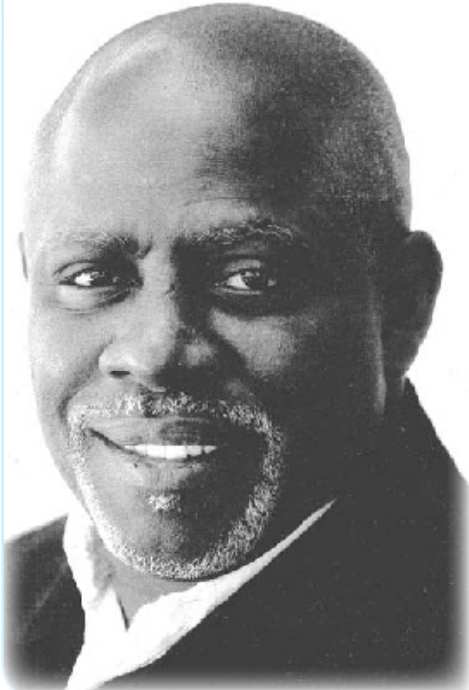
By William Morder
wmorder@streetsheet.org

CONTINUED PN PAGE 6



STREET SHEET, VENDOR OF THE MONTH

“I’M AN ANALOG MAN IN A DIGITAL WORLD”



KEN ADAMS, VENDOR SINCE 1989

By Ian Smith
ismith@streetsheet.org

Says the father of three, grandfather of five, smiling as he sits across from me before his interview “I have a TV that isn’t digital. I had to go buy an analog converter at the store. I don’t need all this new stuff.” Ken Adams likes it simple it seems, though the trials of his life had plenty of complications hidden within. “I’m 52 yrs old and I’ve been selling the Street Sheet for 23 years.” Though homeless at times Ken studied the current issues surrounding homelessness, the services provided, and the people who provided them. “I was an activist during five Mayoral administrations, from Diane Feinstein to Edward Lee.

I’ve been here for 29 years. I’ve seen a lot, and love this city.” Its not hard to believe.

Ken has been working with the Coalition on Homelessness since it founding in 1987, advocating for change and for social equality, In December of 1989, he became a founding member of the Street Sheet family when our very first issue was published. In addition to his work here, Ken had been active with Homes Not Jails, Food Not Bombs and was part of the Homeless Union in the 1980s.

Ken’s activism has still not receded his easy smile and casual attitude gaining him loyal customers and hopefully the Street Sheet some loyal readers.

We were finishing our interview when I asked about his wife,” You’ve been married for thirty years, have three kids and five grandchildren. Must have been and still is a lot of love there huh?” Ken’s demeanor relaxes, a softness rounds his voice, “ Yes, she is the love of my life. We met at Glide. I was hungry and she had a peanut butter sandwich. She didn’t have to but she split it with me. From then on out I brought her pork chops on Thursday and steak on Friday.” A prime example of a good “how we met” story if I ever heard one.

His six foot frame taming the extra swivel chair in the editor’s office, Ken thanks me and excuses himself to keep another appointment. I ask what he would like to say to his supporters. The charming smile returns. “ My dearest appreciation goes out to each and every person who has supported Street Sheet Vendors, myself included, over the past twenty years. At a time when jobs were scarce and good but friends were few, you all helped me with employment and kept me in a job. Some of you gave generous donations both in and out of season. I guess I’d just like to say I appreciate everything and love you all!” No truer words.....

STREET SHEET VENDOR OF THE MONTH

We know we have some pretty awesome vendors out there. We could use your help to recognize them.

Call the editor and nominate the Lady or Gentleman you purchased your **STREET SHEET** from as the next

Vendor of the Month

You can contact **Street Sheet**
by phone at:
415-346-3740 ext. 309
Or by E-mail at:
kdotson@cohssf.org

Or if you’re in the area, drop by 468 Turk, Between Larkin and Hyde and ask for Ken

Winners will be recognized in the first **STREET SHEET** edition each month.

The second edition of the month will feature the winner’s story, giving you an opportunity to better know our

VENDOR OF THE MONTH

A LETTER FROM A FAMILY IN NEW ENGLAND TO A MISSING LOVED ONE IN SAN FRANCISCO:

Hi Beaux K., Happy Birthday!!

We miss you so much and want you to know how much. We live so far away so we are sending one of us to San Francisco to see you for Thanksgiving. One of us will be there November 19th to 28th, 2012 and You are invited to Thanksgiving Dinner!

But we do not know your address! We made an email address just for this so you can respond and we can arrange a meeting place; SFwithBeaux@gmail.com

A lot has happened since we last saw you. You have a new nephew, Max and a new niece, Dylan Marie. Mom is moving and wants you to come visit her soon at her new address.

If anyone knows Beaux K. and can get this message to him please help us find him by giving this to him. You can send us information at SFwithBeaux@gmail.com if you know how to contact him.

We cannot wait to see you!

*Love to Beaux K.
from Mom, Family, Sisters and Friends on the East Coast.*

BERKELEY REJECTS MEASURE "S" CONTINUED FROM PAGE 1

ues are otherwise more conservative than their constituencies'. In the Bay Area, we are fortunate that it is far more difficult to electorally target queers and undocumented people. (People in these communities can certainly think of contrary examples, but we have undeniably been spared the worst excesses of the rest of the country.)

But in the past fifteen years, conservatives have struck on an alternative scapegoat for San Francisco: Homeless people. In election after election, San Francisco voters have been asked to pass punitive measures against homeless people (often as part of a combined package that included some benefits, so as to ease consciences, sometimes with the argument that these punitive measures would actually help homeless people). In many cases—including 2010's Proposition L—the law passed has been one that did not actually need voter approval: it could have been passed by the legislature. But other things do need voter approval. A wedge issue on the ballot which has helped to distinguish conservative candidates has had a noticeable effect on the composition of the Board of Supervisors, and arguably has been a determining factor in recent years for the mayoralty.

In Berkeley, similarly, conservatives have no chance if they are not supportive of the most basic rights for queer people or people without documentation. In the past two months, Berkeley has passed the nation's first Bisexual Pride Day and has instructed the Berkeley Police Department to end its association with Secure Communities. So conservatives attempted to adopt the San Francisco model, using frustration with homelessness in the city as a wedge issue to affect rent control and development.

Berkeley's City Council could have chosen to pass a sitting prohibition (over the objections of progressive City Councilmembers Max Anderson, Jesse Arreguin, and Kriss Worthington), but chose instead to place the matter on the ballot. The same funders who backed Measure S were also heavily involved in two other races as primary funders: A conservative Rent Stabilization Board slate that was involved with organizations such as the Berkeley Property Owners Association that have advocated for the end of rent control, and Measure T, a development giveaway for West Berkeley that was opposed by most residents of that neighborhood. Measure S provided a convenient wedge issue for the one, and obscured the other. As Berkeley formerly homeless activist Dan McMullan put it, "They bet that the people of Berkeley, in the privacy of the voting booth, would be mean enough to kick our poorest community members while they were down." And they thought that the malice accompanying that kick would carry far enough to make more selfish, less reasonable decisions prevail on other electoral matters.

But outspending wasn't the only tack that the corporate backers of Measure S took: The campaign to pass Measure S included a mailer that failed to mention what the law would actually do (make it a crime to sit on sidewalks), and claimed instead that the law would keep people out of jails, help them into services, and "provide hope for those on our streets who are hopeless. It comes down to saving lives." In a desperate last-ditch move, proponents of Measure S hired homeless people

(largely from Oakland, who were unfamiliar with the issue) to hold Obama signs and hand out misleading fake Democratic Party Voter Guides that endorsed the measure. The Democratic Party took no stance on Measure S. In fact, five out of the six endorsing Democratic clubs opposed the measure. (The sixth had on its board one of the leaders of the Yes on Measure S campaign.)

But big money failed. Measure S has been defeated. Measure T is trailing by less, but it, too, seems unlikely to pass. While the conservatives were able to get one member elected to the Rent Stabilization Board, the other three seats up for election have all gone to defenders of rent control and vocal opponents of both Measure S and T.

Why didn't the San Francisco model work in Berkeley? I have been heavily involved in homeless community organizing in San Francisco for

also benefited from tremendous support from organized labor and housing advocates. However, there were also progressives who were shy of the issue: I recall a conversation with one candidate who told me that they opposed Proposition L, but couldn't do so openly: "I have my constituency to think about. They'd eat me alive." Another endorsing organization printed two versions of its endorsement guide: one that opposed Prop L for areas where they thought the proposal would be unpopular, and another that didn't mention the issue. Progressive community support against Prop L was phenomenal, but not complete. Berkeley saw a more nearly total level of committed support from the progressive community. The candidates against whom Measure S was intended to be used as a wedge issue didn't shy away from it: Rent Stabilization Board Commissioner Igor Tregub spoke

vocally and passionately against Measure S; Commissioner Asa Dodsworth organized a rollicking Black-Tie Sit/Lie Chess Championship; Commissioner-Elect Alejandro Soto-Vigil knocked on doors and spoke about Measure S when he spoke about his own candidacy; Danfeng Koon, who organized both the progressive Rent Stabilization Board slate and the Kriss Worthington for Mayor campaigns instructed her volunteers to walk No on Measure S lit at the same time that they walked the literature for those two campaigns: Without that effort, No on S literature

would have reached tens of thousands of fewer Berkeleyans than it did. City Councilmember Max Anderson, whose challenger was a supporter of Measure S, also didn't shy away from the issue, and was perhaps the measure's most eloquent opponent. Even candidates and campaigns who were not targets of the wedge issue campaigned hard against S: Every challenging mayoral candidate—most notably City Councilmember Kriss Worthington—spoke openly against Measure S. Mayoral candidate Jacquelyn McCormick, who differed from other progressives on several issues, also took a principled stand against S, and started a Community Campaign Center on University Avenue that allowed for an unprecedented level of coordination, beneficial to numerous grassroots campaigns.

There's a lesson in this for San Francisco: Here, we have too often followed the lead of the nervous national Democratic Party leadership, and have backed away from controversial wedge issues. The grassroots core of San Francisco progressivism has been heartfelt and devoted to real, compassionate solutions to homelessness and the defense of poor people's civil liberties, but too much of our political leadership has let electoral concerns outweigh our consciences. Ironically, as Berkeley has shown us, it is precisely that shyness of conviction that has kept us pinned to this recurring wedge issue. It is our fear that has allowed the San Francisco model to be effective. In San Francisco, the San Francisco model of homelessness as a wedge issue will end when there is a progressive consensus that it can no longer be allowed to work.

Bob Offer-Westort is a former Coalition on Homelessness organizer. He was a lead organizer in the campaign against San Francisco's 2010 Proposition L, and was the campaign coordinator against Berkeley's Measure S.



BERKELEY RESIDENTS GATHER NEAR THE DOWNTOWN BART STATION TO OPPOSE MEASURE "S"

seven years, and worked against Measure S in Berkeley. I suspect that the answer is twofold.

The first is that the campaign against Measure S learned from San Francisco. We held numerous fun and engaging actions, much as happened in this city. But we didn't depend exclusively on that kind of "earned media": The media infrastructure of Berkeley is likely too weak for such tactics to have an adequate impact. We also engaged in traditional, grassroots campaigning, knocking on doors and talking with Berkeleyans about homelessness, about Measure S, and about real solutions for the city. Over the course of two months, we estimate that we were able to talk with about 10% of the Berkeley electorate. Money can buy print space, Web banners, and airtime. But it can't buy personal convictions or face-to-face conversations. When those of us who believe in civil liberties, compassion, and pragmatic solutions to social problems talk with our neighbors, we win. The numerous volunteers—both homeless and housed—who created these brilliant events and who knocked on doors every single weekend and many week nights were able to defeat the tens of thousands of dollars sunk into this campaign by the East Bay's largest developers. Many of these volunteers were from groups that have been involved in homeless people's struggles in the long term—most notably the East Bay Community Law Center, the Homeless Action Center, and Building Opportunities for Self-Sufficiency. But dozens more were simply concerned community members who saw a social wrong, and knew that they could do something to right it.

The second is the shape of Berkeley progressivism. In San Francisco, the community was tremendously supportive. The Coalition on Homelessness played a central role in the campaign against Proposition L, but it did so jointly with the Day Labor Program (then of La Raza Centro Legal, now part of Dolores Street Community Services), but we

UGLY
CONTINUED FROM PAGE 3

five dollars on toothpaste, deodorant and soap, or on food and clothes.

If we seem listless, dazed or unresponsive, it may well be the result of shock and trauma from what has happened to us, combined with sleep deprivation. And while nobody should ever go hungry in San Francisco (of all places), many do. Often, while waiting in line for a bed over a couple weeks, I simply did not eat; because that meant getting out of line, and I would lose my place. So I often subsisted on only two or three meals, and maybe 20 hours of sleep, in an entire week.

What I said about food and drink applies equally to other bodily functions. Where does one go, when one really has to go? I stopped drinking liquids nearly altogether for the better part of a month, but this did not quite solve the problem. At least twice a day, nature would call, never at a convenient time and place. As might be expected, this can have some serious detrimental effects on one's health.

Until one has done it, standing in line for 17 hours a day, in hopes of getting a shelter bed, is unimaginable. Once one learns where to get a bed for the night, that will be our reality for at least a few weeks, sometimes months. On average, only one of six homeless people will manage to get a bed at night. Until they figure out how the waitlist system works, they will be lucky to get an occasional bed. Due to the system's complications, they will generally not be able to get to the shelter until 10 or 11 pm, which is after lights-out. They arrive late, bang around in unfamiliar circumstances, and annoy the regulars — who are generally mistrustful and suspicious of "one-nighters."

Lights come on at 5:30. If there were no fights or loud conversations to keep us awake during the night, we might have managed five hours of sleep in a shelter, on those nights when we are lucky enough to get a bed. And next day, we start all over again, getting up to go wait in line for another 17 hours. I usually got a bed about three nights a week; the other four nights, I slept on the sidewalk. And this, I might add, is only if we are both smart enough to figure out the system, and lucky enough not to become a victim of crime, accidents or violence.

To get a one-night bed, we are told to show up between 7 and 8 a.m. In practice, however, this means 5 a.m., which means that you have to get up at 4 a.m., after getting to sleep (if you were lucky) at 11 p.m. Twice I was told by secu-

rity guards, when checking in late, that I would have to throw out the bag containing my laptop computer, my research, my personal information and business.... No explanation was given, but I turned around, and went back out to sleep in the street.

To escape the endless loop of one-night beds, the next step is to get a 90-day bed. Only then can one begin to get even the smallest bit of control over one's life again. And to do this, one learns, the best way to increase one's chances is to stake out one of the drop-in centers for as long as it takes. You show up by at least 10 or 11 p.m., and spend the night there in order to be first in line in the morning. This is the only way to place high enough in the waitlist for a chance at a bed. To do this means, of course, giving up any chance of one-night beds in the meanwhile, and going back to sleeping outside, but the goal is worth it.

Along the way, I have been advised that I would stand a better chance of getting a bed, or even supportive housing, if only I had a drug or alcohol problem. Medical problems, mental illness, or physical disabilities can also sometimes be to our advantage in getting off the streets. But to be healthy and reasonably well adjusted is actually an obstacle to getting off the streets. Case workers want to hear that homeless people have problems; problems which, for the purpose of statistics, funding and so on, fit into convenient categories.

If you are sharp enough to figure out the system, amid the mess that is your own life, can keep clear of confusion all around from other people's lives — then perhaps you will manage to get a 90-day bed, and eventually move on up and out of the shelter system again. This assumes, of course, that you also have enough street smarts to keep from getting killed or injured, that you can get along with different personalities, that you understand the principle of respect that is essential to survival out there in the streets; and, that you can keep an open mind and heart. Not everybody, it must be understood, has the requisite skills to navigate the labyrinth of the shelter system, social services and government agencies.

Poverty grinds us down, makes us lose our will to keep on pushing ahead. As I write these words, I am within an inch of losing practically everything I own — at least, everything that really matters to me. I cannot afford to pay the rent for my storage space; and to make matters worse, the storage company is trying to jump the gun, and get into my stuff even before they are legally entitled to do so. I ought to have until the end of the month, but they are trying to seize ev-

erything in the next couple days. They say that they will cut my lock, and auction off my things: my library of 8000 books, my computer equipment, my bikes, my vinyl records, all my family photos, the only pictures I have of my parents, children and grandchildren. And part of me is tired of fighting, just wants to give up.

Over the past two years, this has become a recurrent pattern. Many things have been taken from me — stolen mostly by persons in positions of authority — and there were many more failed attempts, where I managed to escape by a hair. This makes for constant stress, because we want to cling to the life we once had; but homeless people, it seems, have no right even to their own possessions.

Knowledge is the only force that can trump both money and power. To pull ourselves up out of the gutter, we have to know a few tricks about surviving, the sort of things they never taught in school. We also need to cultivate the will to keep on pushing, and it is easier when somebody out there cares about us.

And there, you see, is my point. I am one of the lucky ones; I am just talented enough to get treated a little better than many others. I managed to find my way off the streets and into a shelter. Now I am working to get my own place again, where I can come and go as I please, where I can get back control over my own life. It is difficult to hold down any kind of job, even as a volunteer, unless we can control our time, unless we have a key to our own place. There are many obstacles in our way, and the game seems designed to confuse us.

What happens to those people who aren't quite so lucky? What if their entire lives have repeated a pattern of abusive relationships? By habit they get themselves involved in the underworld of prostitution, gambling, drugs, grifting, or some other sort of hustle. And the worst part is that social services and government agencies implicitly assume that everybody has "other," undeclared income. (Honestly, who can possibly survive on \$59 a month?)

Those are the people who get swept aside and ignored, because the media tend to focus on success stories. They are the ones whom we see sleeping barefoot under a thin blanket in winter. They will die on the streets, and nobody will bother to write an obituary.

And remember, dear reader: if you should become homeless yourself (which is becoming increasingly likely), the ugly truth is, you stand a much better chance of dying outdoors of hypothermia than you do of becoming a media success story.

SIMPLE SOLUTION
CONTINUED FROM PAGE 1

Times reported that 20% to 30% of the city's lots were vacant. Using Census data, Data Driven Detroit states that the city's average vacancy rate is 22.5%, or over 75,000 units.

Las Vegas
Rental vacancy: 11.9%
Homeowner vacancy: 3.9%

Casino gaming is a multi-billion transnational industry with some of its strongest roots planted in Las Vegas. The façade of bright lights and the chance to win jackpots is easily pushed aside when we are presented with the bleak fact that Las Vegas is ranked fourth in the nation for homelessness per capita, with 50 homeless people per 10,000, according to a 2011 study by the National Alliance to End Homelessness and its Homeless Research Institute in Washington D.C.

(The nation averages 21 homeless individuals per 10,000 people.) Social services are incredibly sparse, evident with 40% of the homeless population sleeping outside and unsheltered.

In total, 9,432 homeless people reside in the City of Las Vegas—an estimated 1,430 of whom are U.S. Veterans. Las Vegas, however, currently has 32,012 vacant housing units.

Houston
Rental vacancy: 15.5%
Homeowner vacancy: 1.9%

Houston, the largest city in the state of Texas with over 2 million people, is home to more Fortune 500 company headquarters than any other city except New York. Although, when we look at the distressing homeless rates of the city, we can see that Houston is a microcosm of the housing crisis affecting this country, with nearly 16% of all rental units lying vacant and unused.

Even with a 2010 gross domestic product

of \$385 billion, the city of Houston and the surrounding counties leave approximately 1 in every 636 residents without a stable home. The Houston Coalition for the Homeless, through a point-in-time homeless enumeration, estimates that there are at least 7,356 homeless people in Harris and Fort Bend Counties. Of the 3,824 people left unsheltered, 22% were U.S. Veterans. Regrettably, over 260 people, nearly one-quarter of the individuals that night, were under the age of 19.

The Houston school districts records an appalling "estimated total of 12,512 homeless youth" identified in the 2011-2012 school year. The 8,647 students doubled-up in homes with other families represent the largest portion of these children, followed by the 2,706 school children living in shelters. 608 of Houston's school children were without any shelter.

The 2010 Census indicated that there are over 90,000 vacant housing units in Houston, Texas.

415-788-0770

sf-care

Do you have
Schizophrenia
or Bipolar Disorder?

You may qualify for a
paid clinical trial

Call
415-788-0770

COHSF NEEDS LIST

COMPUTERS & PERIPHERALS:

LCD Flat Screen Monitors
Macintosh Computers G5+
Dual core or higher PC's
Mac or PC Laptops
(same specs as above)
USB Keyboards & Mice
USB/FW External Hard Drives
External DVD Burners

OTHER:

Digital Cameras
Digital Video Recorders

Please contact Ken at 346.3740 or
kdotson@cohsf.org.
Thank you!

*We appreciate all generosity
All donations are tax-deductible.*

SHELTER MONITORING COMMITTEE SCHEDULE

Bring your concerns and recom-
mendations about the shelters to
the Shelter Monitoring Commit-
tee monthly meetings:

December 19, 2012, 10
a.m..

City Hall, Room 408

You can leave a confidential mes-
sage about any shelter issues at
415.255.3642. You may call this
number collect.

Tell us both compliments and
complaints.

*Help us improve
your shelters!*

A PAES CLIENT ADVOCATE MAY HELP YOU!

If you and your worker can't agree on your employment
plan or services you need to get a job, call or visit the Bay
Area Legal Aid's Client Advocate at the GAAP office:

Sabrina Barnes
276 Golden Gate at Hyde
415.928.2544
Monday, Tuesday, Thursday, Friday: 9-noon, 1:30-4

SPEAKERS BUREAU

Does your school, professional organization,
congregation, or club want to learn more about
the real issues behind homelessness?

- Why are there so many homeless people in San Francisco?
- Why does the problem seem so intractable?
- What needs to happen for this situation to change?

The Coalition on Homelessness would wel-
come the opportunity to speak to you and pro-
vide accurate, documented information about
homelessness.

Please contact us at:
415.346.3740
or e-mail your request to:
coh@cohsf.org
to arrange a presentation.

*Why waste your weekend on a garage sale when you can **DONATE:***

clothing, leatherwear, shoes, furniture, electronics, lamps, toys, bicycles, collectibles, books/magazines, artwork, housewares, music and movies, luggage, mirrors, jewelry and accessories, crutches/wheelchairs/walkers

to **COMMUNITY THRIFT** at **623 VALENCIA**. Please be sure to designate **COALITION ON HOMELESSNESS, ACCOUNT #205** as the beneficiary. All donations must be boxed or bagged. You can call Community Thrift at 861.4910 to ensure your donations will be accepted at the drop-off site at Sycamore Street. Hours: 10 a.m.-5 p.m. daily.

HELP SUPPORT THE STREET SHEET

When we began publishing the **STREET SHEET** in 1989, we never imagined that homelessness would remain prevalent in our community, or that the response from City officials and the mainstream media would be so punitive. Our reasons for publishing the paper are the same today as they were at the inception of the project: The need still exists for perspectives on homelessness and poverty that go beyond the simplifications that appear in most news sources.

In order to maintain an independent voice, the **STREET SHEET** and the Coalition on Homelessness’ other projects are not supported by government or corporate interests—We depend on the continuing support of individuals like *you* who believe that the work of creating solutions to homelessness matters.

The easiest way that you can help provide long-term support for this work is by becoming a sustainer: giving a small amount every month, every quarter, or twice a year.

- Making a sustaining pledge is easy: After you set up a pledge with us, we can electronically bill you or charge your credit card as often as you choose.
- Making a pledge is affordable: Ten or twenty dollars a month is affordable for most budgets—that’s only \$5 to \$10 per paycheck! But those smaller gifts add up to a very meaningful contribution over a year’s time.

For a \$50 pledge, you can become an underwriter of the **STREET SHEET**. Your support:

- Provides critical information on available services, programs, changes, and policy developments that affect homeless people.
- Remains the primary vehicle for San Francisco’s homeless people to voice their concerns, opinions, and stories to 32,000 readers monthly.
- Provides over 230 extremely poor vendors the opportunity to earn money for food, shelter, and other necessities every month.

Together, through monthly contributions to the Coalition’s work, sustainers are helping to make the important work described above possible. Please become a part of this grassroots effort today.

Name: _____

Address: _____

City: _____ State/ ZIP: _____

Phone/ E-Mail: _____

- I want to support the Coalition and the **STREET SHEET** at \$ ____ /month for ____months
Please list my name in the **STREET SHEET** as: _____
- I want to support the work of the Coalition on Homelessness with a single tax-deductible contribution in the amount of: *(circle amount)*

\$20 \$25 \$30 \$40 \$50 \$75 \$100 Other \$ _____

Please charge my credit card: **MasterCard** or **VISA**

Expiration Date: ____ / ____ Name as it appears on card: _____

Signature: _____

Mail to: **Coalition on Homelessness 468 Turk Street San Francisco, CA 94102**

UNDERWRITERS

Special thanks to the following **STREET SHEET** underwriters from the staff and volunteers of the Coalition on Homelessness. Your continued support has been vital in keeping the **STREET SHEET** on the streets since 1989. For further information on how you can underwrite the **STREET SHEET**, please contact us at 415.346.3740.

Rudd Canaday
Jesse J. Henry
Alexander Mulder
Lore and David Phillips
Bob Prentice
Qoöl Happy Hour
Toni and Randy Remillong
Amy and Harvey Rose
William Roth
Douglas Scheppegrél
Van Swearingson
Sylvia and John Warnes
Karen and Joe Weisman
Richard Wiersba
Dani Williams

The work of the Coalition on Homelessness is also made possible by the generous support of the following foundations:

Astraea Foundation
Ben & Jerry’s Foundation
Lynn Handleman Fund
Hays Family Foundation
Margaret Mellon Hitchcock Foundation
Victor and Lorraine Honig Fund
Left Tilt Fund
Unitarian Universalist Fund for a Just Society
van Löben Sels/RembeRock Foundation
Edna Wardlaw Charitable Trust
Winky Foundation

COALITION ON HOMELESSNESS
468 Turk Street
San Francisco, CA 94102
415-346-3740
http://streetsheetsf.wordpress.com
www.cohsf.org
kdotson@streetsheet.org

RETURN SERVICE REQUESTED

Non-Profit Organization
US Postage
PAID
PERMIT NO. 3481
San Francisco, CA 94188